

into bands of Red Shirts was unknown in North Carolina until the 1898 campaign. Prior to 1898, the Red Shirt phenomenon had originated and grown into a powerful white supremacy force in South Carolina under Ben Tillman and Wade Hampton.³⁵ The first appearance of Red Shirts in North Carolina occurred in Fayetteville in October 1898. At that rally, Tillman attended a parade that featured thousands of spectators and 200 Red Shirts. Also participating in the rally and parade were many White Government Union clubs and their guests, including delegations from Wilmington and other towns.³⁶

With but a short-lived rule in North Carolina politics, the Red Shirts were characterized by their distinctive red outfits, unconcealed weaponry, and blatant public displays of white supremacy propaganda. Although all levels of society participated in

the Red Shirt brigade, from wealthy businessmen to working-class farmers and laborers, the loudest and most visible members were considered hoodlums—making the Red Shirts effectively a terrorist arm of the Democratic Party. According to a contemporary, their unifying insignia, the red shirt, was of varying style and material, made of “calico, flannel or silk, according to the taste of the owner and the enthusiasm of his womankind.”³⁷



Red Shirt that belonged to Charles B. Aycock. It is unclear if he wore this shirt or if it was presented to him in 1898 or 1900.

Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh.

Spanish American War under Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's Rough Riders were instrumental in American victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill and their bravery became widely celebrated.

³⁵ Alfred Williams, in his history of the Red Shirts in South Carolina, wrote that the common explanation for the development of the red shirt as a uniform emerged during the 1876 campaign. In response to the use of bloodied shirts of murdered blacks as banners to rally Republican supporters, South Carolina Democrats countered the “bloody shirt” argument by wearing red shirts of their own in order to mock and belittle the Republican symbolism. Alfred Williams, *Hampton and His Red Shirts: South Carolina's Deliverance in 1876* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Co., 1935), 105. For more on Tillman, see Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944) and Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Politics of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³⁶ A recognized statewide leader of the Red Shirts was future governor Cameron Morrison. H. Leon Prather, “The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898-1900” *Journal of Negro History* (April, 1977), 174-175; London Papers, Private Collections, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Red Shirt and Rough Rider brigades typically paraded or rode horses in plain view in black communities, brandishing rifles and pistols. Because their actions were well known among African Americans,

³⁷ Just as the Ku Klux Klan had a short-lived usefulness for the Democratic Party, the Red Shirts were found for only the 1898 and 1900 elections. Prather, “Red Shirt Movement,” 175; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 293.